Home Care Instructions after
Lumbar Laminectomy, Decompression, or Discectomy Surgery

Surgery Date: ________________________________
Doctor: ________________________________

This handout will go over the care you need to follow once you are home. If you have any questions or concerns, please ask your nurse or doctor. Our staff is here to help you. If you have questions after you are at home, please call the numbers listed at the end of this handout.

Activity

You should slowly increase your activity. In most cases, common sense will tell you when you are doing too much. On the other hand, doing too little can delay the return of your strength and stamina.

- You may bend or lift as you are able; to lift or pick up an object from the floor, squat with your knees bent.
- No golf for 4 weeks
- You can climb stairs

Note: If you had a discectomy, no lifting over 10 lbs (about 1 gallon of milk) for the first 4 weeks after surgery.

Smoking

We strongly suggest you quit smoking, avoid tobacco products, and second hand smoke. Smoking will slow bone healing. It is best not to smoke for at least 4-6 months after surgery.
Compression Stockings (TEDS)

To improve blood flow and decrease the risk of getting a blood clot, you need to wear elastic stockings (TEDS) until you are walking and back to your normal activities. Remove the TEDS 2 times each day for one hour at a time. You should sleep with them on. You may wash the TEDS with soap and water. Let air dry.

Walking

Your doctor will give you a walking program. Start this program once you get home. You should walk daily. Slowly increase the distance you walk. In most cases, the goal is to walk at least a ½ mile by the time you return to your follow up visit.

Sitting

You may sit as long as you want depending on your comfort level. You should change your position every 30 minutes.

Sleeping

Sleep either on your back, stomach, or side. You may use pillows for support. Place pillows behind your knees when lying on your back. Place pillows behind your back and between your legs when lying on your side.

Bathing

You may shower 5 days after your surgery. Avoid tub baths for 2 weeks.

Driving

Do not drive while on narcotic pain medicine.

Do not drive until your reflexes return to normal. If you had a decompression or laminectomy, you may drive 1 week after surgery. If you had a discectomy, you may drive 3 days after surgery. Ask your doctor when you can begin to drive.
Sexual Activity

After 1 week, you may resume sexual activity, if comfortable.

Incision Care

Proper care of the incision helps to prevent infection.

- If the incision is clean and without drainage, you may stop wearing the dressing after 5 days.
- Keep the incision clean and dry.
- Change the dressing every other day or as needed.
- The incision has been closed with sutures under the skin and covered with steri-strips (small pieces of tape) on the skin. These will slowly peel off as they get wet when you shower. You may gently remove them after 10 days.
- Check the incision daily to be sure it is clean and dry.
- Check for redness, swelling or drainage. Some redness and swelling is normal.
- A small amount of clear or slightly blood-tinged drainage from the incision is normal.
- **Do not wash directly over the incision.** Wash around the incision gently with soap and water and then let air dry.
- **Do not use any creams, lotions, ointments, or alcohol near or on the incision.**

Temperature

Take your temperature twice a day for 10 days.

Pain Management

You may have more pain and numbness in the low back and legs during healing. This is normal. It is caused by swelling of tissue in your low back. To reduce the pain, there are many options to try.

Ice Therapy Method

Ice the incision area for 15 - 20 minutes as often as needed. Do not put the ice directly on the skin. Use a pre-made ice pack or put ice in a plastic bag and wrap in a towel before you use it.
Pain Medicine

You may also need to use pain medicine. If needed, take it as prescribed.

- **Narcotics**: Do not increase the prescribed dose without checking with your doctor or nurse.
- **Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)**: Ibuprofen, Advil®, Motrin®, Aleve®, etc. These may be used as long as you do not have stomach or peptic ulcer disease, kidney/liver disease, or bleeding problems. Do not take these if you have heart disease or high blood pressure unless you have been given other instructions.
- **Neurontin®/Gabapentin**: If you have been taking these before surgery, you should keep taking them unless you have been told not to.
- **Tylenol® (acetaminophen)**: You may take up to 4000 milligrams per day. Percocet® and Vicodin® also contain Tylenol®. Do not take Tylenol® if you have liver disease without checking with your doctor first.

Constipation

The combination of surgery, narcotic pain medicine, decreased activity level, and a change in your diet, can play a role in getting constipated. It is common to have a problem with your bowels after surgery. Please see Health Facts for You #4843, Constipation from Opioids (Narcotics).

When to Call the Doctor

- Increased pain, swelling, or redness in or around the incision site
- Sudden increase in pain or pain not relieved by medicine
- An increase in the amount of drainage, change in the color of drainage, or any odor from the incision; Be ready to describe what the drainage looks like, how it smells, and how much there is.
- A temperature above 100.5°F or 38.1°C for 24 hours
- A “new” chest pain or “new” problem with breathing
- Redness, warmth, or tenderness in the back of the calf of your leg(s)
- A persistent headache that is different when sitting or lying down
- Problems urinating or having control of your bladder or bowel movements
Return to Work

When you return to work will depend on your recovery and the type of work you do. In general, plan to return to work within in 1 to 4 weeks. You must talk about this with your doctor.

Refills

The Spine Clinic staff will be working with you to balance pain medicine, pain management, and activity. The goal is to taper you off of your pain medicine by 6 weeks after surgery. If you need a refill on your pain medicine, call the Spine Clinic and ask for the nurse. Please call when you have a 2 to 3 day supply left of your medicine. Be ready to give the name and phone number of the drugstore where you want to pick up a refill.

Future Clinic Visits

The nursing staff will help you schedule your first clinic visit in 4-6 weeks. All other clinic visits will be as needed.

Important Phone Numbers

If you have questions or concerns, please call the Spine Clinic. Monday through Friday - 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM at (608) 265-3207

Nights and Weekends, call the paging operator at (608) 262-0486. If you live out of the area, call 1(800) 323-8942. Ask for the “orthopedic resident on call”. Leave your name and phone number with the area code. The doctor will call you back.